

Documents on Diplomacy: The Source

The Crisis Averted

A Dispatch from Secretary Seward to Charles Francis Adams, No. 15

Department of State, Washington, June 8, 1861

Sir: I have the pleasure of acknowledging the receipt of your dispatch of May 21, (No. 2,) which contains a report of the conversation which you had held with Lord John Russell on the 18th day of that month. . . .

I hasten to say, by direction of the President, that your course in this proceeding is fully approved. The government had no disposition to lift questions of even national pride of sensibility up to the levels of diplomatic controversy, because it earnestly and ardently desires to maintain peace, harmony, and cordial friendship with Great Britain. Lord John Russell's proposition, by authorizing the President to put the most favorable construction possible upon the response which was deemed exceptionable, removed the whole difficulty without waiting for the intervention of Lord Lyons. You will announce this conclusion of Lord John Russell and inform him that the settlement of the affair in so friendly a spirit affords this government sincere satisfaction.

. . . it is the purpose of our government, if possible, consistently with the national welfare and honor, to have no serious controversy with Great Britain at all; and if this shall ultimately prove impossible, then to have both the defensive position and the clear right on our side. With this view, this government . . . has

determined to pass over without official complaint the publications of the British press, manifestations of adverse individual opinion in social life, and the speeches of British statesmen, and even those of her Majesty's ministers in Parliament, so long as they are not authoritatively adopted by her Majesty's government. We honor and respect the freedom of debate, and the freedom of the press. We indulge no apprehensions of danger to our rights and interests from any discussion to which they may be subjected, in either form, in any place. Sure as we are that the transaction now going on in our country involves the progress of civilization and humanity, and equally sure that our attitude in it is right, and no less sure that our press and our statesmen are equal in ability and influence to any in Europe, we shall have no cause of grieve if Great Britain shall leave to us the defence of the independence of nations and the rights of human nature. . . .

We are gratified by the information you have given us of the friendly spirit which has thus far marked the deportment and conversation of the British government in your official intercourse with it.

I am, sir, respectfully, your obedient servant,

WILLIAM H. SEWARD

Source

United States Department of State, *Message of the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the thirty-seventh congress*, Vol. I [Washington, D.C.: 1861]

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